

5.15.07 - Rahall Co-Sponsors Legislation To Revive COPS Grant Program

WASHINGTON, DC - An outspoken advocate for the proper funding of local law enforcement, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, D-WV, is co-sponsoring landmark legislation that will rebuild the COPS hiring grants program, authorizing a total of \$1.15 billion over the next six years and allowing for the hiring of up to 50,000 new officers. The bill, H.R. 1700, the COPS Improvement Act of 2007, was passed by the House of Representatives Tuesday, which also marked Peace Officers Memorial Day.

"As we come together during Police Week to honor our brave law enforcement officers who have served with such great dedication and who, in some cases, have made the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe, we are reminded of our need to provide our first line of defense with the support they deserve," Rahall said. "For the past several years, we have had to fight tooth and nail for every dollar we have gotten for the COPS program. Finally, we have passed a bill that will revive this vital program and I couldn't be happier."

COPS, which stands for Community Oriented Policing Services, is a program that began during President Clinton's administration and has distributed funding to put more police officers on the street and help deploy technology. COPS hiring grants program has proven to be an enormously successful and popular program, helping local law enforcement agencies to hire 117,000 additional police officers from 1995 to 2005. In West Virginia, COPS grants have funded 690 additional police officers and sheriffs deputies. To date, more than \$46 million in COPS grants have been awarded to law enforcement agencies in the State of West Virginia. This includes more than \$2 million to add 20 school resources officers and more than \$4 million for crime-fighting technologies.

Unfortunately, over the last few years, the Bush Administration has sharply reduced the funding for COPS hiring grants, reducing them from more than \$1 billion a year in the late 1990s to \$10 million in 2005 and eliminating them entirely in 2006. Rahall has been an outspoken opponent to the cuts, joining the The National Sheriffs' Association in calling for the restoration of funding.

"Clearly, COPS is a program that is vital to effective law enforcement and to sheriffs in both rural and urban jurisdictions," said Sheriff Ted Kamatchus, President of the Association. "The COPS Improvements Act of 2007 is unmistakably a step in the right direction toward ensuring that the COPS program receives the much needed revitalization to make law enforcement agencies better able to address public safety needs."

In addition to the hiring grants, the legislation passed Tuesday also authorizes \$350 million a year for the next six years for technology grants. These grants will allow police agencies to purchase things like laptop computers for patrol cars, crime mapping software, and interoperable communications equipment.

"Bringing GPS technology to our law enforcement personnel will provide them with some of the most modern crime-fighting equipment available," said Rahall. "Our police have the difficult job of protecting our communities and fighting crime. Providing state-of-the-art technologies like GPS will give them a leg up on catching criminals and responding quickly to emergencies that may arise."

Recently, The Nick J. Rahall, II Appalachian Transportation Institute (RTI) received \$493,614 COPS grant from the United States Department of Justice to assist the West Virginia State Police (WVSP) in installing a mobile, paperless, data-reporting and responding system in 600 vehicles used throughout the state.

The federal funding for the project was secured by Rahall as part of the Department of Justice appropriations bill last year.

"This project is a perfect example of why we need to keep the COPS program alive and well," Rahall said. "West Virginia residents deserve the same police protection that is already being used in many parts of the country," Rahall said. "Better technologies for our courageous officers make everyone safer."

The bill passed Tuesday also authorizes \$200 million per year to help hire community prosecutors and contains a 'troops to cops' provisions to encourage state and local police agencies to hire former military members for some of the new law enforcement jobs under the bill.

This legislation has been endorsed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs Association, the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Association of Police Organizations, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the National League of Cities.